

SEEK Testimony to the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement

March 1, 2021

Testimony in support of HB 6517 - AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE TO ANALYZE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAWS GOVERNING DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING.

Special Education Equity for Kids (SEEK) is a statewide organization of parents, providers, attorneys and advocates working for high quality education and civil rights for Connecticut students with disabilities. We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective with you today.

SEEK strongly supports HB 6517, which would implement key recommendations of the Dyslexia Task Force, including ensuring that teacher preparation programs comply with the requirements of dyslexia legislation and that teacher candidates can effectively assess and instruct students with dyslexia.

Currently, this is not happening. Instead, the vast majority of teachers and reading specialists, in Connecticut and elsewhere, are graduating from schools of education without having been taught to effectively teach reading to anyone, let alone students with dyslexia. Yes, Connecticut has taken important steps with previous dyslexia legislation, but the Task Force recognized that no agency has taken responsibility for operationalizing its requirements statewide. Which means that we are continuing to “miss” students with dyslexia and are failing to provide them with the structured literacy intervention they need to be successful.

This legislation also seeks to ensure that our schools are using valid, research-based screens to identify young children who are at risk for becoming poor readers.

Children who are poor readers are at significant risk for dropping out of school, for becoming depressed or suicidal, for being unemployed/under-employed, and for ending up in the prison system. If a child doesn’t learn to read well, they lose access to everything. Simply by preparing our teachers and reading specialists, we can change this trajectory.

It is important to note that it is not only students with dyslexia who will benefit from this legislation. If our teachers and reading specialists are trained to teach students with dyslexia to read, they will be prepared to teach nearly any child to read. Research indicates that approximately 95% of children are capable of reading on grade level. In stark contrast, according

to our SBAC data, Connecticut fails to teach about 50% of third graders to read on grade level--and many of these students do not have dyslexia. If our teachers and reading specialists receive adequate training in structured literacy--which takes years and must include supervised practicum--they will be able to teach nearly any child to read, including those with and without dyslexia.

If there is any support that SEEK can provide to move this forward, we are ready and willing to help.